

# **The Safe Lawn Campaign**

*An ES 401 Partnership with the Voice for Potash Brook*

**Middlebury College Environmental Studies Senior Seminar (ES 401)  
May 2004**

**Caleb Elder  
Mandy Helwig  
Chris Loeffler  
Colin Rodgers  
Lauren Throop**

## **Safe Lawn Campaign Executive Summary**

The Safe Lawn Campaign is sponsored by the Voice for Potash Brook, a non-profit citizen group in South Burlington dedicated to protecting and restoring water quality, as well as enhancing the environment and quality of life in South Burlington. The Safe Lawn Campaign encourages residents of South Burlington to sign the 'Safe Lawn Pledge.' The pledge involves a commitment to reducing or eliminating pesticide and chemical fertilizer use by individuals or organizations within the Potash Brook watershed.

Our group met with Fred and Sharon Kosnitsky, the founders of Voice for Potash Brook, as well as Chuck Hafter, the City Manager in South Burlington, to discuss our participation in the Safe Lawn Campaign. The Safe Lawn Campaign is imperative for protecting human and environmental health throughout South Burlington. Currently, Lake Champlain and its tributaries are being polluted by numerous non-point sources, including runoff of pesticides and chemical fertilizers from lawns in South Burlington. Potash Brook is one of the numerous polluted streams that flows into Lake Champlain. Thus, if more local South Burlington residents and businesses adopted the Safe Lawn Pledge and reduced or eliminated their use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, they could help protect the threatened Champlain Basin watershed.

**Goals:**

- Encouraging enrollment in the Safe Lawn Pledge, especially among large businesses, condominium associations, and major landowners, as well as the residences and schools located along the riparian zones of Potash Brook.
- Focusing on one-on-one connections with South Burlington residents and property managers.
- Researching alternative lawn care practices, specifically organic pesticides and fertilizers.
- Generating awareness among local residents and businesses in South Burlington regarding the negative effects associated with pesticide and chemical fertilizer usage, including health risks and environmental threats (e.g., eutrophication).

**Methods:**

- Gathered information about who to contact from Fred and the local Yellow Pages.
- Contacted people through phone calls, e-mails, and personal visits.

**Contacts and Results:**

- Contacted lawn care companies and garden supply stores throughout South Burlington to determine 1) what products they used/sold to their customers; 2) what products and practices they recommended to their customers; and 3) whether or not they offered organic pesticides and fertilizers. Notable contacts include:
  - Todd Barnhart, with Everyday Landscaping, recommended Kevin Breen for streamside/ lakeside landscaping practices.
  - Kevin Breen, with Levinsky Landscapers, is an expert in biological control practices. For example, he sows white clover, as opposed to applying chemical pesticides, to lawns in riparian zones.
  - Gardener's Supply recommends and sells organic lawn care products. They were very supportive of the Safe Lawn Campaign. Contacts: Lisa Yankowski and Maree Gaetani
  - Four Seasons garden store sells both chemical and organic fertilizers and only chemical pesticides. Contact: Deb Page

- Set up Displays and Workshops
  - Set up a Safe Lawn Campaign display at Gardener's Supply, in South Burlington, with pledges and a drop box available for customers. They planned to keep the display up indefinitely and Fred Kosnitzsky is responsible for collecting the signed pledges and restocking the box.
  - We also attempted to set up a display at the Four Seasons garden store, but they were wary that the display would have a negative impact on the sale of their chemical fertilizers
  - Worked with Nancy Hewitt (Master Gardener's Program) to set up a Safe Lawn workshop to promote healthy lawn practices in the Burlington area.
- Met with a local garden group in South Burlington
  - Hosted a garden group meeting at Carol Weibust's home with forty local South Burlington residents. Many of the women signed the Safe Lawn Pledge, and some took the pledge home with them.
- Developed a PowerPoint presentation describing the Safe Lawn Campaign, including its components and the reasons for its development. Our hope was that South Burlington residents could use the presentation in Safe Lawn Campaign meetings that they set up in their neighborhoods.
- Passed out information about the Safe Lawn Campaign to two property managers for condominium associations in South Burlington.
  - Carol Gansby Property Management: Colin Rodgers worked previously with Carol's company. We tried to contact her numerous times with no reply. We stopped by and dropped off a copy of the Pledge in hopes that she would assist us, but no luck.
  - Marion Servidio, Park Place Management: Resistant upon initial contact, but was more receptive once we further explained the campaign to her. She received a copy of our PowerPoint, but did not agree to show it to her condo associations.
- Talked with individuals on Church Street and passed out the Safe Lawn Pledge.
- Contacted local residents, churches, synagogues, businesses, property managers, condominium association board members, real estate managers, and neighborhood associations in South Burlington in attempts to schedule meetings to discuss the Safe Lawn Pledge and its potential implementation.

## **Businesses**

- Twin Oaks Sports and Fitness Center, local South Burlington business
- IDX, local South Burlington business
- Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, local South Burlington business
- Ben and Jerry's, local South Burlington business

## **Government Officials**

- Helen Head, State Representative
- Chuck Hafter, South Burlington City Manager

## **Residents**

- Barbara Zellman, president of a condominium group at Town Square
- Ellen Powell, former member of South Burlington's Natural Resource Committee
- Ascension Lutheran Church, local South Burlington church
- Tim Barrett, former volunteer of Voice for Potash Brook
- Tom Grocki, supporter of Voice for Potash Brook
- Pat Lilienthal, supporter of Voice for Potash Brook
- Melissa Pasanen, supporter of Voice for Potash Brook
- David Bailey, middle school science teacher
- Curt Belton, high school science teacher
- Nancy Simson, member of the South Burlington Rotary Club
- Carol Weibust, local South Burlington resident
- Rich Cassidy, member of the South Burlington Rotary Club
- Jeffrey Pascoe, attended Voice for Potash Brook events
- Bill and Barbara Bull, citizens interested in protecting the environment
- Nina Jaffe, supporter of Voice for Potash Brook
- Sarah Dopp, founder of the South Burlington Land Trust

\*All of the aforementioned contacts (including businesses, government officials, and residents) in South Burlington were not interested in becoming involved or further associated with the Safe Lawn Campaign.

## **References:**

- Lake Champlain Basin Program, primarily for eutrophication information-  
[www.lcbp.org](http://www.lcbp.org)

### **Suggestions for the Future:**

- Develop a virtual “Watershed Tour” to show individuals and organizations during presentations of the Safe Lawn Campaign. Volunteers for the Voice for Potash Brook could create the virtual tour by taking digital photographs of the Potash Brook watershed.
- Focus on educating individuals without antagonizing their current practices
- Set up a stand with Safe Lawn information and pledges at Shelburne Farms, Basin Harbor Country Club, or the Burlington waterfront on several weekends
- Set up a stand with Safe Lawn information and pledges at well-attended South Burlington events, especially during the spring and summer seasons
- Continue including articles about the Safe Lawn Campaign in local newspapers
- Include information about the Safe Lawn Campaign in local church or synagogue newsletters
- Continue focusing on person to person interaction, rather than mass mailings
- Consider canvassing in neighborhoods that border Potash Brook
- Apply for funding from the local and state governments to help facilitate the campaign

### **Conclusion:**

We encountered more problems than we anticipated in promoting the Safe Lawn Campaign in South Burlington, especially among local businesses and condominium associations. Many of the individuals, such as property managers and condominium association board members, with whom we spoke were worried that we were just going to criticize their current lawn care practices and encourage them to adopt unnecessary and costly new methods. One woman told us that her organization would not be interested in hearing our presentation because, in her experience, individuals may even threaten to file law suits if groups attempt to convince them to change their lawn care practices. As a

result, we encourage the Voice for Potash Brook to concentrate on creating a supportive network for the Safe Lawn Campaign through continuing to make contacts with local residents, individuals, and organizations. Additionally, we recommend that they always approach meetings from an educational, rather than interrogative, perspective. Individuals were more receptive when we said we wanted to inform them about the campaign, as opposed to requiring them to change their practices. The Safe Lawn Campaign has great potential to help restore Potash Brook and the greater Lake Champlain Basin watershed, and we encourage it to continue expanding throughout South Burlington and the state of Vermont.

## The Safe Lawn Campaign

Thomas G.  
Laurie D.  
Kathy M.  
Linda L.  
Linda M.  
Linda M.



Voice for Potash Brook



## What is the Safe Lawn Pledge?

- A commitment to reducing or eliminating the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers on your lawns



## Why Sign the Pledge?

Chemical pesticides and fertilizers cause eutrophication and pollution, which . . .

- Threaten the health and safety of South Burlington citizens (especially children, who are more susceptible to toxins)
- Threaten the health of the watershed and Lake Champlain

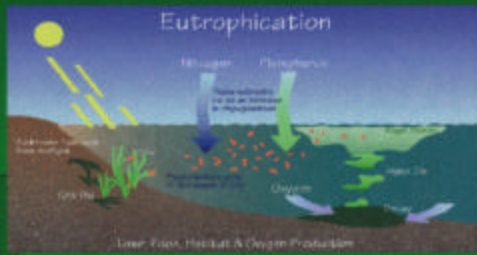
## Non-Point Source Pollution

- Accumulation of minor pollution from many sources in a watershed.
- Includes stormwater runoff, atmospheric deposition (i.e. acid rain), and groundwater discharge.





## Eutrophication



## Alternatives to Chemical Application

### Pesticides

- Use least toxic alternative
- Clean up chemical spills
- Do not apply when windy or rainy
- Use biological controls instead
  - example: white clover prevents weeds

### Fertilizers

- Only fertilize when soil tests show it is necessary
- Only apply amount needed
- Use organic compost as an alternative
- If you're close to surface water, consult a specialist\*

\* See section on Eutrophication, from Council on Ecology, Garden.org

## How to Adhere to the Pledge

### If you care for your own lawn:

- Buy natural products
- Do not mow your lawn shorter than 3 inches
- Leave grass clippings on your lawn
- Diversify species (add a garden, trees, shrubs, etc.)
- Water deeply, relatively infrequently, and not during high sun intensity

### If a commercial service cares for your lawn:

- Request organic pesticides and fertilizers
- Ask the service to use the same techniques listed above
- Request they wait for your permission before applying pesticides and fertilizers

## Costs of Switching to Organic Products

- The costs of switching from chemical pesticides and fertilizers to fewer or non-chemical products could cost an estimated \$0 to \$30 to switch products\*
- Future environmental restoration and public health costs can be reduced
- The long-term benefits of a healthy neighborhood and environment GREATLY outweigh the short-term economic costs!

\*Turf Control lawn care service - 651-8872

\*NaturalLawn lawn care service - 652-4961

## Organic Lawn Care is Effective

- There are plenty of phosphorus free fertilizers that are just as effective as their chemical alternatives
- Localized use of pesticides is just as beneficial as blanket pesticide application
- Use biological controls such as...
  - Corn gluten
  - Roundworms
  - Milky spore
  - Mixture of water and vinegar
  - White clover

## Biological Controls

- Living organisms that are alternatives to chemical applications
  - For grub control, use roundworms or milky spore
  - To suppress weeds, use corn gluten or a mixture of water and vinegar or white clover

## 4 Reasons to Adopt the Pledge

- Cost is minimal compared to benefits
- Non-chemical methods can be just as effective as toxic chemical use
- Protects your neighborhood's children and pets by reducing exposure to hazardous toxins
- Preserves the water quality and environmental health of Potash Brook and Lake Champlain